

Park Access & Trails



Grassy Ridge Access Area: located in Sapphire, 0.7 miles south of Hwy 64w on Hwy. 281s. A visitor center, parking, picnic facilities, restrooms and primitive campsites are available.

Rainbow Falls Trail (USFS): This strenuous 1.5-mile trail travels west out of Gorges State Park and into the Pisgah National Forest. The state park trail ends after ¾ of a mile and connects to a path in the Pisgah National Forest. Blaze = orange circles.

Bearwallow Valley Overlook Trail: This moderate ½-mile trail travels west to one of the highest overlooks in the park. This trailhead is located at the Bearwallow Picnic Area, between the picnic shelter and the restroom. The trail ascends to one of the highest points in the park. At 3,200 feet above sea level, hikers will be able to enjoy views including: Bearwallow Valley, Chestnut Mountain, South Carolina, Lake Jocassee, Lake Keowee and on a clear day, even Lake Hartwell. The trail ends at the overlook platform. Trail distance round-trip is one mile. Blaze = red triangles.

Upper Bearwallow Falls Trail: This strenuous ½-mile trail travels east to one of the first set of waterfalls to enter the park. This trailhead is located at the Bearwallow Picnic Area, across from the picnic shelter and restroom. The trail descends to Bearwallow Creek, where Upper Bearwallow Falls can be seen dropping 200 feet into the gorge. The trail ends at the overlook platform. Trail distance round-trip is one mile. Blaze = blue triangles.

Frozen Creek Access Area: Trailhead parking is located on Frozen Creek Road, off of Hwy 64 west, near Rosman, on the northeastern side of the park. A parking area, restrooms, picnic area and trailhead are located at this 24-hour access area.

Auger Hole Trail: Hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding are allowed on this trail. Hikers will get their feet wet crossing two river fords: the Toxaway River (mile 3) and the Bearwallow Creek (mile 3.5). Mountain bikes and horses are not allowed past Turkey Pen Gap. At this crossroads, the trail bears left and connects to the Foothills Trail. Trail distance round-trip is 14.5 miles. Blaze = orange squares.

Canebrake Trail: This strenuous 5.2-mile trail winds southward and ends at Lake Jocassee and the Foothills Trail around the Canebrake campsites. The trail ends at the Foothills Trail, where the Toxaway River flows into Lake Jocassee. The lake can be seen from the suspension bridge on the Foothills Trail and camping is permitted at

the Canebrake campsites on Lake Jocassee. Trail distance round-trip is 10.4 miles. Blaze = yellow squares.

Foothills Trail: This trail runs 6.7 miles through the park. Access to it can be found at the end of the Auger Hole Trail (7 miles in) or the end of the Canebrake Trail (5 miles in). It is a 76-mile hike in South and North Carolina, along the Blue Ridge Escarpment. It extends from Table Rock State Park, S.C. through Gorges State Park, N.C., then back to Oconee State Park, S.C. This trail was established by Duke Energy and is maintained by the Duke Energy and the Foothills Trail Conference. Blaze = white paint blazes.

Gorges State Park is an excellent area for outdoor activities. Whether you're looking for a short day-hike, an overnight backpacking adventure or something in between, Gorges State Park is the place to go.

Hiking: Offering rugged terrain that will challenge any outdoors enthusiast, visitors who traverse the steep, backwoods trails of Gorges State Park will be rewarded with views of dazzling waterfalls or perhaps an encounter with one of the numerous rare species of the park. However, some of the more secluded areas of the park are not recommended for casual hiking.

One of the park's most popular pathways is the Foothills Trail. Established by Duke Energy, the trail winds along the southern portion of the state park and wraps around Lake Jocassee, where primitive campsites are available. The trailhead is located at the Frozen Creek access area in Rosman on Frozen Creek Road. This area provides parking, picnic areas and trailheads.

Mountain biking and horseback riding: Horses and mountain bikes are permitted on the Auger Hole Trail from the Frozen Creek access area to Turkey Pen Gap on the western boundary of Gorges State Park. The Frozen Creek access area in Rosman provides a picnic area and trailhead for the equestrian and hiking trail. Horses and mountain bikes are not permitted beyond Turkey Pen Gap.

Nature's Classroom

Rangers hold regularly scheduled educational and interpretative programs covering a variety of topics about Gorges State Park. Programming is open to the public, special groups and schools. Contact the park office to arrange learning opportunities for your group or class.

Picnicking

Picnic tables in the midst of the forest make Gorges State Park a pleasant spot for lunch or dinner after an exhilarating hike. Some picnic tables are wheelchair accessible. Visitors must carry out what they bring into the park. Recycling stations are located throughout the park.

Visitor Center

The gold level LEED certified 7,100 square foot-building opened in October 2012. Perched at 3,372 feet, it provides visitors with spectacular views of the park. Featuring a large exhibit hall, auditorium, classroom and observation decks, it is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Flora & Fauna

Gorges State Park is located along the Blue Ridge Escarpment, an area where five streams carry water to the ocean from the divide between the Tennessee Valley drainage and the Atlantic drainage. In the upper reaches of the escarpment, mountain streams gradually descend but near the state line, their waters plunge over spectacular falls and rush through steep-walled gorges.

With such a rugged and contrasting topography contained within a small area, the park includes 21 of the 44 natural community types known in the mountain regions of North Carolina. Nearly 125 rare plant and animal species that occur in the mountain counties of North Carolina, including 12 endangered or threatened plant and animal species are found in the park.

From the rock outcrops of the peaks, to the high-elevation forests, to the spray cliffs surrounding the waterfalls, to the streams themselves, this ecologically rich region has been identified as being of national ecological significance by the Natural Heritage Program.

Several plant species more typical of the tropics thrive in the constant spray from the park's numerous waterfalls. Scientists are unsure how these species came to grow so far from the tropics. One theory is that spores were carried by the wind or perhaps the species remained in the region from tens of thousands of years ago when a warmer climate existed in North America.

While few large plants can establish a hold on the steep, slick rocks surrounding the spray cliffs of the gorges, a rich community of ferns, mosses and liverworts grow in the moist, moderate temperatures of the region. Examples include rare species such as the Carolina star-moss, known in the Dominican Republic and Pringle's moss, found in Mexico but in the U.S., it is solely found in the Blue Ridge Escarpment region. Gorge filmy-fern, Appalachian filmy-fern and dwarf filmy fern, plants with leaves that are only a single cell thick, are also found in the gorges. The gorge filmy-fern grows only in the southern Appalachian gorge region.

Although you might feel removed from civilization while walking deep into the Gorges wilderness, evidence of past human interference with the environment surrounds you.

One of the most damaging interferences to the Gorges environment occurred in 1916 when the dam containing Lake Toxaway – the largest private lake in the state—broke. Record amounts of water gushed southward down the river, destroying the communities in its path, scouring the gorges and leaving piles of debris 15 to 20 feet high. These debris piles still remain.

After the flood, local citizens eventually sold large land tracts in the Gorges to Singer Sewing Machine Company, which logged most of the land evident of the many old logging roads that transect the property. Then in the 1940s and 1950s, Singer sold the land to Duke Power

Also found in Gorges State Park are Oak and Pine communities typical of dry mountainous regions. However, the areas high rainfall, averaging 85 inches a year, enables the environment to support both common and rare species. Abundant species include rhododendron and mountain laurel, along with white pine, hickories and red oak. Oconee bells, also known as shortia, a rare flowering plant is most abundant in the gorges region of North Carolina and because so few populations of the plant are known, Oconee bells are considered to be an endangered species. The plant has single-stalked, white flowers, which stand above the evergreen leaves that form low patches along escarpment streams.

Common animal species of the region include black bear, wild turkey, fox, coyote and deer, as well as a variety of squirrels. North Carolina's largest known population of green salamanders, an endangered amphibian, occurs in the gorges.

The forests of Gorges State Park also provide abundant habitat for neotropical migratory birds, including the largest North Carolina mountain populations of Swainson's warbler.

Three fish species – turquoise darter, redeye bass and rosyface chub – have their only North Carolina populations in the park's rivers that are part of the Savannah River drainage. In addition, the nearby Horsepasture River is both a designated federal Wild and Scenic River and state Natural and Scenic River.



History Highlights

Corporation. The corporation purchased the land for its steep topography and high rainfall, which offered opportunities for development of hydropower projects. Crescent Land and Timber Corporation, a subsidiary of Duke Power, managed the land, closing some roads and limiting human access to protect the environment.

Conservation studies began in the area in the late 1970s. In 1982, nearly 275 acres of land currently in the park was placed on the N.C. Registry of Natural Heritage Areas because of the numerous rare species. In the late 1990s, Duke Power determined that it no longer needed portions of Gorges for future hydropower and offered the land for sale to the natural resources agencies in North and South Carolina. With the support of local citizens and the General Assembly, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation created the first state park west of Asheville.

Fishing & Boating

Rainbow trout, brown trout and smallmouth bass can be found in the waters of Gorges State Park. Fishermen who are up to the challenge of fishing in remote locations, are invited to try their luck. All streams and rivers in the park are designated Wild Trout Waters. Regulations of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission apply. Anglers should exercise caution and stay away from waterfalls. Due to the rugged nature of the park and swift water currents, no swimming is allowed in rivers, creeks or ponds. Bearwallow Creek and Toxaway River both flow through the center of the park. Lake Jocassee, a deep lake straddling the North and South Carolina border is a haven for trout and bass fishermen. Boat access is available at Devil's Fork State Park in South Carolina.

Camping

Gorges State Park offers primitive camping in vastly different natural environments. A favorite park for backpackers who are looking to get away from the beaten trail, campers will find solitude after the strenuous hike.

Primitive camping is available from the Frozen Creek Access Area and the Grassy Ridge Access Area. There are six designated backpack sites along the Foothills Trail near the southern boundary of Gorges State Park. These sites are free of charge and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. They are not reservable. Access to the Foothills Trail at Gorges State Park is at the Frozen Creek parking lot. Follow the square yellow markers on the Cane Brake Trail.

Primitive Camping can also be found at Raymond Fisher Campground. There are 8 designated sites with fire rings, picnic tables and lantern hooks. A pit privy is also available. Access to the Raymond Fisher Camp Area is at the Grassy Ridge parking lot. Follow the blue circle markers on the Raymond Fisher Trail for 1.5 miles. While camping, visitors can enjoy the scenery and peaceful nature of the small Ray Fisher pond located within the camping area. These sites are only available by reservation, for a fee.

For additional information on the Foothills Trail, contact the Foothills Trail Conference at www.foothillstrail.org.

Make a reservation online
at ncparks.gov or call
1-877-7-CAMP-NC
(1-877-722-6762).

Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our regulations are posted for the protection of our visitors and our park. A complete list is available at the park office.

- ❑ The removal or destruction of any plant, animal, artifact, rock or mineral is prohibited.
- ❑ All areas managed by the Division of Parks and Recreation are wildlife preserves. Hunting and trapping are prohibited.
- ❑ N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission boating and fishing regulations are enforced.
- ❑ Fireworks are not permitted.
- ❑ Firearms and other weapons are prohibited except that those with a proper permit may possess a concealed handgun in permitted areas and under the requirements of North Carolina G.S. 14-415.11. All firearms and weapons are prohibited in visitor centers & park offices.
- ❑ Camping and fires are allowed in designated areas by permit only.
- ❑ The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- ❑ Swimming is permitted in designated areas only.
- ❑ Pets must be on an attended leash no longer than six feet.
- ❑ Horses and mountain bikes are permitted on designated trails only.
- ❑ Unlicensed motor vehicles are prohibited.
- ❑ Please stay on designated trails. Many rare plants live on thin soils and wet rocks, and they are vulnerable to damage from climbing, trampling and scraping.

See the Division's website for a full listing of Rules and Regulations at www.ncparks.gov

Safety

To prevent accidents, remember the following safety tips:

- ❑ Dress appropriately. Check with park staff regarding weather and terrain.
- ❑ Allow plenty of time for a hike so you won't be caught by darkness.
- ❑ Venomous snakes, ticks and poisonous plants may be encountered in some areas. Be watchful and use caution. Remember that all plants and animals are protected.
- ❑ When hiking, stay on designated trails and away from cliff faces and waterfalls.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or for an explanation of park rules.

Welcome!

Welcome to Gorges State Park where you'll find plunging waterfalls, rugged river gorges, sheer rock walls and one of the greatest concentrations of rare and unique species in the eastern United States.

An elevation rising 2,000 feet in only four miles, combined with rainfall over 80 inches per year creates a temperate rain forest and supports a collection of waterfalls.

On April 29, 1999, thanks to a unique partnership of industry, the environmental community and the state of North Carolina, 10,000 acres of the Jocassee Gorges in Transylvania County were placed in public ownership to be preserved for future generations of North Carolinians. The property was purchased by the state from Duke Energy Corporation and the transaction created a 2,900-acre game land managed by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and a 7,100-acre state park. The park continues to grow through donations and acquisitions. Currently, park acreage is nearly 8,000 acres.



Park Hours

November - February 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March - May, September & October 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
June - August 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day

Visitor Center 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

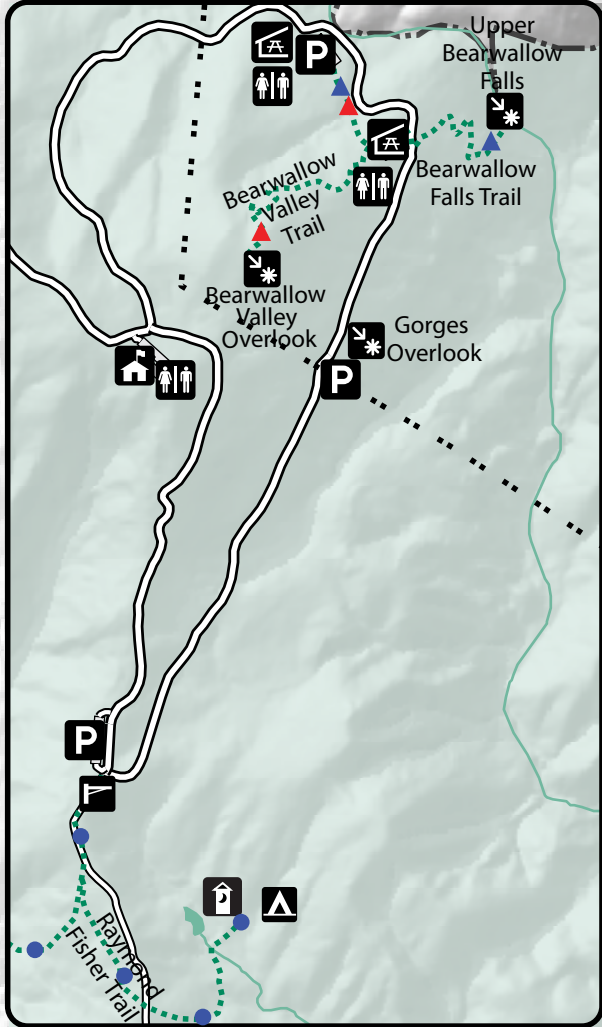
Contact Information

Gorges State Park
P.O. Box 100
976 Grassy Ridge Road
(828) 966-9099
Sapphire, NC 29774
gorges@ncparks.gov
www.ncparks.gov

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources
1615 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615
(919) 707-9300

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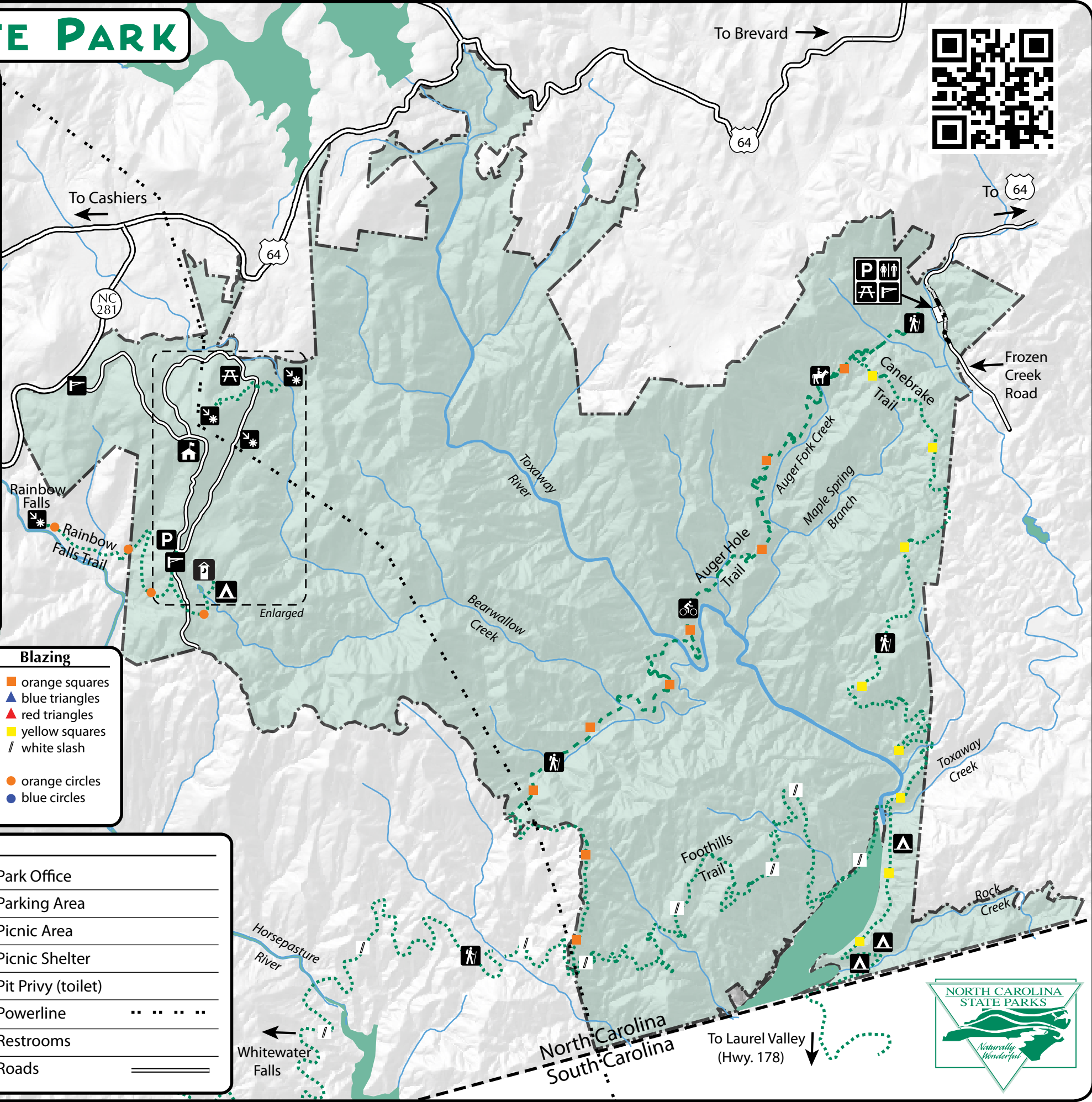
GORGES STATE PARK



TRAILS	Difficulty	Distance	Blazing
Auger Hole	strenuous	14.5 miles	orange squares
Bearwallow Falls	strenuous	1.0 miles	blue triangles
Bearwallow Valley	moderate	1.0 miles	red triangles
Canebrake	strenuous	10.4 miles	yellow squares
Foothills	strenuous	6.7 miles	white slash
Picnic Connector Trail	easy	0.4 miles	
Rainbow Falls	strenuous	3.0 miles	orange circles
Raymond Fisher Trail	easy to moderate	1.5 miles	blue circles

Distances are roundtrip

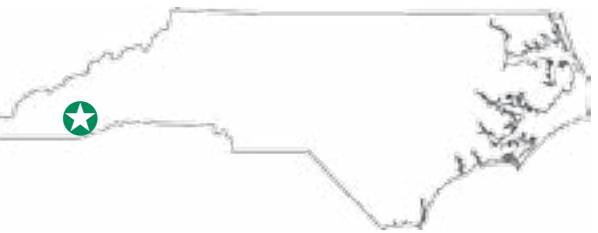
LEGEND	
Backcountry Campsite	Park Office
Hiking Trail	Parking Area
Hospital - Transylvania Regional (828) 884-9111 Emergency 911	Picnic Area
Multipurpose Trail - Hiking Biking & Bridle	Picnic Shelter
Overlook	Pit Privy (toilet)
Park Boundary	Powerline
Park Gate	Restrooms
	Roads



N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



STATE PARK GORGES GORGES STATE PARK



Gorges State Park is located in Transylvania County and joins the North Carolina/South Carolina state line. The park is approximately 45 miles southwest of Asheville.

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